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# Facilitation Team Roles in Online GMB

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## METHODS BRIEF SERIES 2.03

The COVID-19 pandemic ushered in the new reality of remote working and learning, forcing group model building practitioners to make an abrupt shift to online workshops. Like our peers, the Social System Design Lab (SSDL) at Washington University in St. Louis confronted this challenge by exploring what tools existed for adaptation and continued collaboration. The shift has not been easy, but it has revealed new insights that suggest areas to leverage the strengths of online GMB long after the pandemic comes to an end.

**The purpose of this brief is to compare facilitation team roles in traditional, in-person GMB sessions with those in online GMB sessions, shedding particular light on how the realities of online platforms shift what tools facilitators have at their disposal when engaging a group of participants.**

### + IMPORTANCE OF CONVENING A FACILITATION TEAM

As many have written before, facilitation of group model building (GMB) workshops is a team sport. It is too much for any one person to carry the cognitive load of facilitating challenging conversations, producing system dynamics models, navigating technology, observing group dynamics, and monitoring the agenda, all at the same time. Ideally, facilitation team members understand and communicate about their individual roles, practice choreography ahead of the workshop, communicate during breaks to troubleshoot challenges, and support one another in the moment to create a cohesive workshop experience for participants. The goal is for participants to be able to focus on the GMB activities with little to no attention to the complex facilitation and coordination that is happening in the background. Anyone who has been part of a GMB facilitation team knows that a lot of work goes into achieving the appearance of a seamless workshop, and this is just as true - if not more so - in online settings.

## + ADAPTING ROLES FOR ONLINE SETTINGS

The following table builds on group model building roles as described by Richardson and Andersen (1995), Andersen and Richardson (1997), Hovmand et al (2012) and listed on Scriptapedia (Hovmand et al (2015)):

Role	Description (In-person GMB)	Adaptations for Online
<b>Convener / Closer</b>	Welcomes participants; Contextualizes the purpose of the workshop within the larger community or organization effort; Thanks participants for their time.	No change.
<b>Community Facilitator</b>	Extends social capital to help participants engage with the modeling process; Familiar with local or substantive topic and community norms; Mediates conflicts within the session; Requires strong group facilitation skills & connections with participants	Familiar with online platform or software; Demonstrates technology when needed (e.g. joining breakout rooms, etc.)
<b>Modeler Facilitator</b>	Trained in systems dynamics or group model building; Responsible for guiding participants through the modeling process; Requires moderate modeling skills	Familiar with the online platform or software being used for modeling; Demonstrates drawing graphs or diagrams in the online platform.
<b>Reflector</b>	Helps the group reflect on the GMB experience – highlighting interesting insights or challenges that developed; Makes connections between the insights generated during the session and the larger context.	Moves between breakout rooms (if appropriate) to identify themes, challenges, and emerging ideas.
<b>Wallbuilder</b>	Tapes papers containing participants contributions onto the wall as they share, creating clusters of items by emerging themes.	Clusters participant contributions within online platform. When necessary, transfers participant contributions from the chat into online platform.
<b>Runner</b>	As participants share out what they wrote on sheets of paper, brings each paper from the participant to the wall builder to save time (in large groups).	Not applicable.
<b>Recorder</b>	Takes notes, takes photos, and archives all artifacts from the session (graphs, agendas, diagrams, notes, etc.)	Takes screenshots; Saves the chat; Downloads and saves artifacts from online platforms.

Role	Description (In-person GMB)	Adaptations for Online
<b>Process Coach / Timekeeper</b>	Observes the process of the workshop and notifies facilitation team of group dynamics that need to be addressed; Keeps time.	Shares screen; Manages breakout room; Admits participants from the waiting room.

## + ONLINE-SPECIFIC ROLES

The following roles originated out of the need for managing technical aspects of an online group model building workshop and are only relevant for virtual workshops.

Role	Description (Online GMB)
<b>Chat Monitor</b>	Responds to questions or comments in chat when possible; Reports questions and conversations from the chat to the facilitator; Elicits engagement in the chat by making connections and following up.
<b>Technical Support Point Person</b>	Manages choreography of technology (screensharing, breakout rooms, waiting rooms, accessibility features); Ready to troubleshoot and help participants as needed.

## + CONSIDERATIONS

The above roles are guidelines: not all are necessary or feasible for every GMB workshop! The composition of a GMB facilitation team will depend on the specific context. Here are a few questions to consider:

- How many people are participating?
- What are accessibility and/or technological needs of participants that may require more intensive assistance by the facilitation team?
- Are facilitation team members able to successfully maneuver between multiple roles?
- Where are there opportunities to expand your facilitation team to be more inclusive of folks from the communities or organizations who are engaging with modeling?
- What do you hope to accomplish with the workshop? What will make this workshop a success?

## + ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The content for this method brief is drawn from (1) the authors' reflections and experiences facilitating online GMB workshops from Spring 2020 to Summer 2021; (2) Learning from other practitioners, including Wilkerson et al (2020), Zimmerman et al (2021) and conversations with colleagues through regular community-engaged system dynamics community of practice calls; and (3) Participant survey responses in pre- and post-surveys that were administered after platform testing workshops conducted by Lucy Chin and Min Hu at the Social System Design Lab throughout the 2020-2021 academic year.

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## + ABOUT THE SERIES

Social System Design Lab Methods Briefs are short, digestible notes on applications of system dynamics and systems thinking in community settings. They are meant to capture and share out our current thinking on core ideas related to the practice of system dynamics modeling in community and organizational settings.

“Series 2: Online Group Model Building” focuses on sharing reflections and lessons learned from a year of experimenting with, testing, and facilitating online group model building workshops during the COVID-19 pandemic. Briefs in this series include:

- Online GMB: Challenges, Opportunities, and Barriers | **2.01**
- An Overview of Platforms to Support Online GMB | **2.02**
- Facilitation Team Roles in Online GMB | **2.03**
- Engagement and Relationship Building in Online GMB | **2.04**

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